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BEARD, C. A. *The traction crisis in New York*. (New York: Bureau of Municipal Research, 261 Broadway. 1919. Pp. 29. 25c.)

*Public utilities reports annotated, containing decisions of the public service commissions and of state and federal courts*. (Rochester, N. Y.: Lawyers Coöperative Pub. Co. 1919. Pp. 1176.)

### Labor and Labor Organizations

*Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*. Vol. I (Cmd. 135); Vol. II, *Appendices, Summaries of Evidence, etc.* (Cmd. 167). (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office. 1919. Pp. 341; 250.)

This unique and interesting government document is the report prepared by a special committee appointed by the British War Cabinet in August, 1917, "to investigate and report on the relation which should be maintained between the wages of women and men having regard to the interests of both as well as the value of their work." It should be said at the outset that we have not one report but two: a majority report, signed by five members of the committee (all of whom are reported to have been salaried government employees); and a brilliant minority report, signed by Mrs. Sidney Webb. The important recommendations of the majority may be summarized as follows: First, as to the general level of women's wages, the committee protest emphatically against a return to the old pre-war level, and they recommend the adoption of a statutory subsistence wage for women to secure physical health and efficiency. Taking sharp issue with certain women witnesses who testified before the committee, the majority hold that the woman's subsistence wage should be lower than the man's subsistence wage. That is, they recommend that the woman's subsistence wage should be based, not as in the case of men on the requirements of a normal family, but on the needs of a single woman. Without any adequate inquiry into the subject, the committee assume that single women have only themselves to support. They remain confronted with the problem of the widow who is obviously in need of a family wage, and they hastily recommend "mothers' pensions." They refer to the United States as having "solved" this problem by means of mothers' pension laws, without any inquiry as to how satisfactory our American laws may be in practice. That is, so far as the working mother is concerned, the majority really go back to the old poor-law system and recommend that wages should be supplemented out of taxes in

proportion to the number of children the woman may have to support. Would the majority apply this, by the way, to the mothers of illegitimate children and to deserted wives?

It is, however, when the committee come to consider the relation between the wages of women and men in the same occupation that the real battle begins, and here lies the chief interest of the report. For the first time we have an attempt to state the problems involved in the modern use of the old once respected formula "equal pay for equal work," a formula which in an earlier day appeared to carry with it implications of justice and fair dealing but which has failed in practice because of the immense difficulties in the way of determining what constitutes "equal work."

Miss Mary MacArthur, representing the National Federation of Women Workers, protested in her testimony (Cmd. 167, p. 15) that "equal pay for equal work—meaning equal pay for identical work—is, in practice and always will be, a useless formula." Miss MacArthur contended that in cases where the work is absolutely identical there are few employers who will admit this fact without qualification. The formula imposes the onus of proof on the individual and it is almost impossible to collect convincing evidence. The men have almost certainly gone before the women start on the work, and no reliable figures probably exist of the men's output. The employer alone possesses exact statistics of the present output. In nine cases out of ten the bulk of the work going through the factory varies from day to day, and the processes often vary, so as to make any exact comparison almost impossible. The policy of equal pay for identical work, or even the policy of comparative equality of cost to the employer as between men and women, will therefore in practice prove a means of subdividing and lowering the rate and would certainly result in the reduction of the standard of life.

The majority report acknowledges that the rejection of the old "equal pay for equal work" formula, and the substitution of the more workable principle "equal time rates" or the "rate for the job" was urged upon them by the "Women's Unions and Societies connected with labor, and by practically all the general and mixed unions. It was urged with force by and on behalf of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. . . ." Nevertheless, the Committee recommend the old formula which they re-define as "pay in proportion to efficient output." The effect of the new formula would, they thought, tend to diminish the employment of

women, and this might have serious consequences. "We are unable," say the committee, to "recommend at this juncture of the national life a change bringing such doubtful advantages to men and fraught with such serious injury to women as we believe would result from the adoption of the formula 'equal-time rates.'" This possibility of a decline in the employment of women resulting from the adoption of "equal-time rates" is discussed by numerous witnesses. Miss MacArthur held that to give to the women who took on a man's work, the man's rate for the job would tend to exclude women if they were of lower economic value to the employer. In such cases (*e.g.*, where the work is especially laborious) she holds that it is not in the interest of the community that the employment of women

should be made economically advantageous to the employer. . . . In normal times women are only employed on heavy laboring work on account of their cheapness. The Federation think this highly undesirable and press for the rate for the job even more strongly in the cases where the figures of production show that the woman is undertaking tasks for which she is not fitted.

Mr. G. D. H. Cole also faced the possibility of a reduction in the number of women employed if the labor formula were accepted. "The principle of determining a ratio between the economic value of men and women and paying wages accordingly is not workable," said Mr. Cole (Cmd. 167, p. 46). Equal pay for the same occupation must be insisted upon. This would tend to drive women out of industries where they are not of equal economic value to employers.

But the case against the old formula is put so persuasively and so conclusively by Mrs. Sidney Webb that it is a waste of time to quote further from other testimony representing this point of view. Mrs. Webb challenges the recommendation of a lower subsistence wage for women and the justification of the lower wage on the ground that women have no family obligation. Mrs. Webb sees no possibility of making provision for dependents by means of wages varying in amount according to the actual family obligations of the persons concerned. The employers will not listen to any genuine apportionment of wages according to the number of dependents, because they necessarily insist on limiting the amount that they pay to each operator to the value to themselves of the service performed. But what, precisely, is meant by family obligations?

In addition to children, many wage-earners of either sex support, wholly or in part, an invalid wife (or husband), a superannuated father, a widowed mother, an orphan brother or sister, aged grandparents. . . . Now (such) family obligations . . . are common to wage-earners of both sexes. . . . It has been suggested . . . that wage-earning women, as a whole, pay more towards the support of their parents and other relatives than wage-earning men do.

The principle of determining wages by family obligations has not, says Mrs. Webb, been adopted when it is a question of paying more where there are dependents, but it is "habitually pleaded as a complete justification for the existence of a female rate, out of all proportion lower than the male rate."

As to "equal pay for equal work," Mrs. Webb regards this as a fashionable formula at the moment but not as an accepted principle since there is no common interpretation of its meaning. She shows that it is diversely interpreted as: (1) equal pay for equal efforts and sacrifices; (2) equal pay for equal product; and (3) equal pay for equal value to the employer. "Hence any adoption of the formula would lead to endless misunderstandings between employers and employed and increased industrial friction." The popular interpretation has perhaps been the second; but even equal piece rates for men and women (as distinguished from equal time rates) are opposed by many employers. Witness the testimony of one employer who claims that piece work rates as between men and women should "vary according to the different percentages of 'overhead charges' that particular classes of operatives are said to involve"; and the testimony of another employer who justifies lower piece work rates for women because "a woman has not the same potential value as a man." Therefore the inevitable result of the "equal pay for equal product" interpretation and a "woman's rate" not corresponding with or proportionate to any differences in output.

As to the third interpretation, Mrs. Webb notes the objection employers have urged that in particular occupations the great bulk of women are less efficient than the common run of men. Broadly speaking, says Mrs. Webb, in some occupations this may be true; but this does not in itself justify the existence of a male occupational rate and a female occupational rate for the same work. Mrs. Webb says:

I see no justification for classifying together all the workers of one sex, and subjecting them all to a differential rate. It is admitted that some women are, in nearly all occupations, found to be superior in

efficiency to the common run of men; and I can discover no ground for penalizing these exceptional women because of the industrial inferiority of the mass of their colleagues. Exactly the same would be true if, in certain occupations requiring brute strength (such as steel smelting) the workers were classified irrespective of sex, according to whether they were over or below five-feet-five in height, or nine stone in weight.

Moreover, if women are inferior industrially, and, in a given occupation, for example, the work of three women is in general only equal to the work of two men, Mrs. Webb sees here not an argument for a lower occupational rate for women but an argument for the employment of men.

It is clearly uneconomical for the community to exact the efforts and sacrifices of three women for output which could be produced by the efforts and sacrifices of two men. Hence there is no public advantage but actually a sheer national loss in bribing the employer by permitting him to pay lower wages, or to make special deductions from the occupational rate to get his work done by workers industrially less efficient—whether women or men—as long as many more efficient workers for the task required are available.

Mrs. Webb's unassailable logic could not convince her colleagues because the questions of women's employment are not now and, in any near future, will not be decided by weight of argument. They will be decided by weight of tradition, social prejudices, and expediency in the narrow sense. But Mrs. Webb has made so brilliant a statement of the case for the abolition of "women's rates" that her report should have great value as an educational document, and it is hoped that the recently issued cheap reprint<sup>1</sup> of it will find its way to this country.

Justice cannot be done within the limits of a review to the valuable collection of material in the report and in the appendices containing the summaries of evidence. Especial mention must be made, however, of the evidence submitted by six English economists, Professors Cannan, Pigou, Bowley, and Gonner, Mr. Henry Clay, and Mr. J. H. Jones. Professor Cannan's characteristically pungent statement follows the main lines of his analysis of the subject of women's work in *Wealth* (1913); but, fortunately for the reader, he expands delightfully his earlier statement.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Wages of Men and Women: Should They be Equal?* by Mrs. Sidney Webb, published by the Fabian Society and by Allen and Unwin Ltd., pp. 79. A reprint of the *Minority Report*, with an introduction by Mrs. Webb.